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**The Iowa Blind History Archive  
History of Blindness in Iowa - Oral History Project  
Interview with [Name]  
Conducted by [Name]  
[Date]  
Transcribed by [Name]**

**NOTE: Any text included in brackets [ ] is information that was added by the narrator after reviewing the original transcript. Therefore, this information is not included in the audio version of the interview.**

**Sandi Ryan, born June 9, 1951, Ankeny, Iowa  
Mary Clarke  
Iowa Department for the Blind  
4/25/2011**

**Mary Clarke: My name is Mary Clarke, and I'm interviewing Sandi Ryan today. The date is April 25. It is approximately 10:00. We're interviewing at the Iowa Department for the**

**Blind in downtown Des Moines. Sandi, do I have your permission to conduct this interview?**

**Sandi Ryan: Yes.**

**Clarke: All right. I remember you talking a little bit about early years, very early years, when you were, soon after you were born, or a few years after you were born. So, would you start off with that?**

**Ryan: Sure. I was born into a family that already had five brothers in it, so I was the youngest child in the family and the only girl. That always got me lots of attention, and actually, in the town I grew up in, my aunt and uncle lived there with my cousin; and my dad was known as the brother who had the boys, and my uncle is the brother who had the girl. So, I was kind of left out.**

**I was born with crossed eyes, and the doctor told my parents that's not a problem, we'll put glasses on her when she's three and she'll be fine; although, I can't imagine glasses on a three-year-old being fine, but anyway. And, then when I was about 11 months old I got the measles, and it was something that we all were having. Just as I was getting over the measles, my left eye swelled really badly. My mom talked about it as swelling out onto my cheek, about the size of a golf ball, which was alarming. She called the family doctor, and he said that it probably was an infection that had resulted from the measles. And so, he gave her drops and, indeed, they seemed to work. But, about two months later, I woke up in the middle of the night screaming, and the same thing had happened. This time our family doctor was out of town. And, I think that probably**

**saved my life. The doctor who was seeing his patients said that he had no idea what was going on, and that we really needed to go and visit the Wolf Clinic, which at the time was owned by Otis and Russel Wolf, the brothers who started it. And, they x-rayed my eyes and told my parents they knew what the problem was, but that I needed immediate surgery, and they couldn't do it there. So, they told my parents to find a baby sitter as quickly as possible and get me to the University of Iowa. And, they told them that if I was with them when they got to the University Hospital that it would be a miracle. And, I was. My mother said, actually, I sang all the way to the hospital, and she was so glad I did that, because then she knew I was alive.**

**When they got to the University of Iowa hospitals, the doctors actually gave them a choice of doing the surgery right away or having a dead child. They could raise a blind child or they could let me die, which has always made me think that it was pretty serious and advanced. I do know that when they did remove both my eyes, which they did within a couple of days. They determined the next day after I'd had my first surgery that I was also blind in the other eye. They removed my entire optic nerve trying to make sure that they'd gotten all of the cancer. What it was, was retinoblastoma, which is a cancer of the retina of the eye. It happens in very young children. Probably I was born with it, and my mother had noticed when I was about nine months old that, previously, if she tried to hand me something, cookies, or whatever, or a toy, I would reach for it. And, at about nine months I quit. So, at that time, the tumor must have grown enough to be a problem. I know the doctors said they were amazed that I had sat up; because the tumor**

**was so large they couldn't imagine how I could sit up. And, I hadn't crawled, but I did immediately after the surgery.**

**Clarke: I bet you were all over the place.**

**Ryan: I was trouble after that. So, I do have in my files at home a letter from the doctor who was responsible for my care. I requested my file as an adult, and it was really quite moving to read that this doctor, after the surgeries were performed, had written a letter that said, "The prognosis for this little girl living five years is very grim," and so even after they did the surgery I was not expected to live, but I did. That was 58 years ago, and here I am today. So, I don't know that all the doctors thought turning out a blind child was a happy result. I remember my mother telling me that the nurses, when we were in the hospital, and I was there for a while, so she got to know several of the nurses pretty well. And, one of the nurses said, "Well, this child is going to be a special burden for you, because she won't be interested in clothing or jewelry or the things that other girls are interested in. You're going to have to teach her to be interested in those things." Mother always said, "I wish she would have been right." At one point mother told me, you're going to have to marry a hosiery manufacturer as fast as you go through hose.**

**Clarke: So, as you were growing up prior to beginning school, how did your mom react to your blindness? You know, did she give you opportunities? Did she treat you like anyone else in the family, or how did that go?**

**Ryan: Well, I think she did, mostly because she didn't have a lot of time. Every week when she did the washing, she had, you know, 16 pairs of pants to wash for guys and this kind of thing, and lots of cooking. She was cooking for a family of eight, and cleaning and that sort of thing. A lot of what she did, at least, during the part of my life that I remember was turn me over to my two brothers just older than me. The youngest was two when I was born, so he was two years older than me, and the next one was five years older than he was, and so we would play outside a lot. I learned to climb trees and I learned to bail out of swings, and we had these little games we played that were really kind of dangerous. But, you know, I just was one of the kids. And, actually, I'm not even sure I realized I was a girl until I went away to school and lived with girls.**

**You mention school. I did go to the Iowa Braille and Sight Saving School for 10 years. Mother, of course, and Dad had no idea what was the educational opportunity for a blind child. I know my dad told me that one day when I was two, he dropped a coin, a penny I think, and I ran right over to where the penny had fallen and picked it up and handed it to him, and he said, "I knew you'd be okay then." Mother always said that she never doubted that I would be fine. Mother was a very religious woman, and you know, had a lot of faith, and she always says her faith got her through. And, you know, I think it probably did. I think there were lots of times when she didn't quite know what to expect, but we managed very well together.**

**Anyway, there was a lady who came out to see us when I was about four, I think, or three and a half, and she told us that there was a school for blind children. It was about 100 miles away from home, which to me at the time didn't really**

mean much. But, my mother, I know, was really worried because my brothers obviously went to school in the morning and came home in the afternoon. And, being 100 miles away, I would not do that. We went to a preschool, I think, it was three days, you know, kind of an orientation, when I was four. And, I actually stayed in one of the dorms with a couple of the kids, and that was the first time I had ever actually spent time away from my parents, that I remember. So, that was a little bit frightening, but I was very excited about going to school. We had an alphabet card, a Braille alphabet card. And, before I went to school my mother and I, as she cooked dinner or cleaned or whatever, would spell three and four letter words with each letter of the alphabet. So, obviously I needed education.

My parents were not sure how to handle leaving a child somewhere. The day they took me to school, Mother had found a little girl who had already attended the school. She was in second grade when I started in kindergarten, and I had gone to spend a day with her, and so she knew me a little bit. Mom thought that would help. The reason it didn't was, when she got back to school, she was a second grader, and second graders don't play with kindergarteners. So, Mother took me down to tell her that I was there, and she said, "Oh, that's nice." So, mother and I were standing in the line at the water fountain, and the house mother called her over to say something to her, kind of motioned her away, and the next thing I knew, I had gotten my drink and mom wasn't there anymore. And, she told me later that the house mother had told her to leave me standing in the line with the other children, and to just go away, not to say good-bye and make a big deal out of it. That practically panicked me 'cause, I think if you're leaving your child for the day at

**kindergarten, or half day that's an appropriate way to do it; but not when you're leaving them for two weeks. I had a very strong feeling that my parents had brought me to this school, and that their intention was just to leave me there. And so, I was a little kid, you know. I tried my best to adapt to school and to kind of forget about my parents. I would dream about them, and that was hard, but during the day I had lots of new friends and toys to play with that were different than what we had at home and things like that. Two weeks later on a Friday night, when my father came and he was all excited, and he scooped me up in his arms, and I screamed.**

**15:00**

**Ryan: It took me several seconds, at least, to recognize that this was daddy and he'd come back. I know that made him sad, and, you know, it's a memory that I've always had that's kind of sad.**

**I wouldn't have given up my education, but I think a couple of things might have been handled a little better. I did, when I was going to be a junior in high school, decide that I would like to live at home and have a normal life. I loved my friends at school, and during the school year I was happy to be there, and I didn't want to take time out to go home and that sort of thing. You know, you get involved in the activities, but I'd always had this wish to just live at home with my parents, and to know what that was like. And also, I felt that I needed more of a challenge. I skipped second grade at Iowa Braille, and I had read everything that was available at the level of second grade. And so, after I think it was seven weeks in second grade, they put me into**

**third grade, where there were already two people named Sandy. One of them was Sandy and one of them was Sandra. So, I had to be Jean for a while, because that was my middle name. Until the next year, when one of them moved away, and the other one was held back, and then I was the only one.**

**So, when I decided I would go to school in Nevada, I went and spoke with our guidance counselor. He tried to contact the superintendent at Nevada. And, in those days I wasn't the first blind student to leave Iowa Braille and go to public school; but I was about the second or third one I think, and so they didn't have a lot of experience, and the schools did not do mainstreamed educating at that time. And so, that was a very unusual situation. The superintendent was very noncommittal, so I was surprised when my youngest brother, Wendell, brought my mother up to pick me up at the end of the year. And, as we packed the car, he said, or I guess it was after we were in the car he said, "You need to call Mr. Newman." I knew who Mr. Newman was, he was the principal. And I said, "Oh, why?" And my brother said, "Well, I talked to him and he wants to see how serious you are about coming to Nevada High and work out how that could happen." So, I left Vinton for the last time not really knowing whether I'd be back or not. And so, that was kind of hard, because every spring it was hard to go home, where my friends were not. And, then every fall, it was hard to go back to be with my friends, but not have my family there. So, of course, I was very excited, but this was a Friday, and I waited until Monday to call Mr. Newman at the school, because I didn't think it was good to interrupt his weekend. Frankly, I was scared to death to call him. But, he said, well, my brother had told him that I wanted to**



come to school there, and he had been thinking about it quite a bit, and he could see that there might be some problems. For instance, books and things like that. But, that he would be willing to try this out with me, so why didn't we try nine weeks. And, so I went to Nevada on a trial basis, but after nine weeks nobody said go away.

I did through the school for the blind get an older Braille writer. I still have it. I've had it 44 or 45 years, and I don't know how old it was when I got it. And, also the travel teacher, the mobility teacher, came to Nevada and taught me my way to school from home, which was not something I did every day 'cause it was about 15 or 16 blocks, and so if it was raining, nasty, or if it was snowing or whatever. So, I had to have other arrangements, too, but I did know my way there. And, he showed me around the school, and I knew where my classrooms were. When we got to the cafeteria, he said, "Well, now here's the cafeteria line, but for the first two or three weeks you're here, people are just going to fall all over themselves to help you through the line and things like that. I wouldn't worry about this; just know that this is where it is."

So, the first day of school came. Oh, my brother, Wendell, was one year ahead of me in school, even though he was two years older, because I skipped second grade. And so, what we worked out was that he would drive me to school some days, 90 miles an hour, because he got up at two minutes to eight, and the bell for classes rang at 8:00 and the tardy bell rang at five after. But he told me, "At school, I'm not your brother. I don't know you." So, the first day we had an assembly, and the school didn't have an auditorium big enough to hold all the kids, which was kind of silly. So, there was a community center across the street

**and we always went over to Gates Hall for assemblies. And so, I walked over with somebody I knew a little bit, and we sat there. And, when we were released from this assembly, we were released by class, and my brother, as a senior, was to go back to school before I did. And, he came over and he said, "Do you know where you are? Are you okay? Is everything all right?" And I said, "I thought you weren't my brother here."**

**One other story about going to school with him, one day I needed to go get my French book. And our school was in a square around a courtyard, so there were doors on the outsides of the square, and there were also doors on the insides of the square, so you could go across it, across the courtyard and back through a door. But, the lockers were down one hall and then most of the way down another hall, if you'd turn right and go down the hall. And we were late. And so I was going to have trouble getting back into my seat before the tardy bell rang. So, I went to my locker, grabbed my book, and was kind of running down the hall not paying too much attention. I knew there were a couple of guys standing in the hall talking, but I wasn't paying attention to where the guy who wasn't talking was. And all of a sudden, wham, I ran into him, and it was my brother on crutches. He had hurt his knee playing football. And he turned around and he said, "Will," before he turned around he said, "Will you watch out, oh." So, my response was, get me here early enough and I won't knock you down.**

**But, I got along at school really well; except I didn't make close friends easily. The kids accepted me very well at school. They understood that I had a brain, and actually I ran around with the group called the eggheads. But, it was April before I really found my first really good friend at**

**Nevada High, who would do things with me outside of school hours. She walked into the restroom during the play; I had gotten a part in Our Town, and it was actually two parts. One was as an audience member who asked a question from the audience, and then I had to run and get on stage as one of the extras that sing Blessed Be the Ties That Bind. Anyway, a little later, I needed to use the restroom, and I had an infection in one of my eyes. And so, I needed to remove my eye and rinse it off, and then put it back. Well, I got through the removing and the rinsing fine, and then I dropped my eye. So, when this other girl walked in, she said, "Oh, hi I'm Nancy and I've always wanted to meet you. I'm so glad that I'm going to get to." And, of course, I was worried about getting on stage, and so the first thing I said to her was, "Hi, nice to meet you, do you happen to see an eye on the floor?" She tells me to this day that it's a wonder she didn't turn tail and run. But, we did lots of things together. We went bowling and skating, and sometimes people would say to her, well, I'd like to do something with Sandi, but I don't know what we'd do. And, she'd just kind of laugh and say, "Well, what do you want to do?" So, that was school.**

**Between my junior and senior years, I really hoped to have a job, and I spoke with the guidance counselor and he personally went to several people he knew who ran retail stores and asked if they would hire me to do something over the summer. He had first said to me, "Well, what do you like?" And I said, "Well, I like clothes, and I like records." And, you know, I was a kid, so I liked all of those things. But none of his friends even were willing to try out giving me a job. So, it wasn't a big deal. I took French II class via correspondence school. That meant that I took French I**

during my junior year, French II over the summer, and French III in my senior year. So, you know, it wasn't like I wasn't doing something useful, but I would have loved to make some money. You know, my brothers always had paper routes, and other things that they did that gave them money, and I hadn't had that experience.

When I was a senior, I really wasn't sure what I had available to me to do. I knew that I functioned pretty well. But, I had been given to understand that if I could type really well, I might be able to be a secretary, especially if I could work out how to fill out the forms that were needed in offices. And so, I was a good typist and I had, of course, typed all of my assignments in high school. And actually, that's a good story, too. My father, one day, found me crying and he asked what for, and I couldn't answer, and my mother said, "Oh, she's upset because she needs a typewriter to do her assignments, and I told her we can't afford one." And so, the next day my dad was a little late getting home from work, and he never was late. He'd not said anything to my mother about being late, so she was a little worried, and so was I. He walked in about 15 or 20 minutes late and walked over and plopped this huge old typewriter in my lap. And I said, "Daddy, what did you do?" And he said, "Well, you needed a typewriter. I couldn't afford one. I figured the school owed you that, and so I went in and talked to Mr. Newman, and told them you needed a typewriter, and he took me into the typing room and picked this one up and handed it to me." I think Daddy was sorry he did that, because my room was upstairs, and I had the typewriter on kind of a shaky table, so when I typed it kind of shook the upstairs, and sometimes I typed until 10:30 or 11:00 at night. But, he made sure. My father was a very

**quiet man, not a person who, you know, demanded things, or even really aggressively went after what he needed; but for me he did. I've always thought that was really special.**

**Clarke: Yeah, it was special.**

**Ryan: So, probably about a month or two in April I think, late March or early April, just before I graduated from high school, I went to the guidance counselor's office one day. He called me and asked me to come in. And there were two men sitting there. One of them was John Taylor, and one of them was Brooks Beatty.**

**30:00**

**Ryan: And they explained that Mr. Beatty was my Counselor and Mr. Taylor ran Field Operations at the Iowa Commission for the Blind, in those days it wasn't called the Department yet. And that they knew I was a senior in high school, and probably it was time for me to think about what it was I would like to do. And of course, by that time I was a little bit cynical; nobody was going to hire me. So, I didn't have any ideas. So they said, well, they'd like me to come and spend a day or two at the Commission and, you know, see what kind of classes they had here; and kind of work with Mr. Beatty to determine what it is I might want to do. And so I had about a week between finishing my classes and graduation. There were snow days that year, several, but I didn't have to make those up as a senior, and so I had about a week. So, during that week I came down and spent a day at the Commission, and I went to Business class, and I went to Home Ec., and you know, I just did all the rounds.**

**And one of the things I was so interested in was that, at the Commission for the Blind, there was no difference between a person who was totally blind and a person who had some sight. At Iowa Braille, totally blind people always got to do, like, in Home Ec. Class, we got to do the mixing and that sort of thing. But, for putting things in the oven and taking them out, and cooking things on the stove and that sort of thing, usually, people with a little bit of sight did that. And so, I thought wow, am I as good, then, as people who can see a little bit? My mother always told me that totally blind people were kind of lucky because everybody knew we were blind, and didn't question it. But, somebody with partial sight they might think, well, what's wrong with that person that they stumble at the curb, or whatever? So, I don't know that that's true, but that's what she thought. So I decided that I would come for a little while, and see.**

**One of the things that Mr. Beatty and Mr. Taylor had determined was that, even though I had been taught a bit how to use a cane, I wasn't as effective with it as I should be. Partially, that was because my friends in high school didn't want me to carry a cane. They also did not want me to hold their arms, because you know, that was not done, girls holding other girls' arms. So, what they tried to do with me for a time was to walk one on either side of me, and then we'd talk as we went. Only thing was, we'd get involved in talking and nobody would mention to me that, by the way, here comes a flight of stairs. And so, after I fell down about three flights, it's a wonder I lived through that experience, I said, okay I'm carrying my cane. And I did, but I didn't really use it properly. I just had it with me to make sure that there weren't steps in front of me. So, at the Orientation Center, I**

**learned how to travel efficiently and well. I learned how to cook, and I learned a lot about practical things.**

**But the thing I learned that was the most important was that, as a blind person, I am a first class citizen, and that given training and opportunity, I can do whatever I want to do, and I can do it as well as a sighted person. I truly had never believed that. One of the things that taught me that was in business class one day, we discussed that at family reunions I was often asked to help dry dishes. But when my aunt was washing the dishes she would always say to me, “Oh, be careful now, that water I’m rinsing dishes under is very hot.” Well, of course it is. Or she’d say, ‘Oh, here’s a knife, you’d better let somebody else. It’s a sharp knife; you’d better let somebody else dry that.’ So one of the first things I had to do was, politely--and probably I wasn’t as polite as I could have been, let my family understand that I was no longer a child, and that as an adult, I needed to be treated equally and well. And that helped. I wouldn’t say they ever got totally so that they accepted that, but they did much better. My mother’s attitude toward what I might do with my life was, she always wanted me to be a teacher. But, she ruined that for me because she said, “Well, you’d be such a good teacher of little blind children. They so need good role models.” And that isn’t wrong, but I didn’t want to be a role model for little blind children. I wanted to teach in public school. So I just kind of gave up the idea of teaching.**

**I had always thought that I’d probably go to Drake University, but it turned out I didn’t. And there was a reason for that, and it happened here, so I’ll tell you about it. While I was a student, one of the guys who was here was a student at the University of Iowa, and every summer the Department at the time had a booth at the Fair, where the**

**female students made coffee and cookies, and that sort of thing for the public who came through. The guys made candle holders on the shop tools, on those scary shop tools. And, in that day and age girls were not given shop, although the guys did Home Ec., so I never did quite figure that out, but anyway. Hearing this, I'll probably be given the opportunity to come back and take shop.**

**Anyway, so this weekend was coming up, the Fair would be the next week, and I happened by the switchboard. Craig was talking on the phone and I asked him who he was talking to, and he said this was his friend, Kent Ryan, from the University of Iowa, and I said--you have to understand I was 17. I said, "Give me the phone," and so he did. I'm not sure he knew what I was going to do, but without ever hearing this young man's voice or anything, I just said, "Hi, I'm Sandi, I'm 17, I have long brown hair and I'm beautiful. You want to meet me, don't you?" And there was a heart-stopping pause, after which he said, "Well, yeah, sure." So, by the time, this was on a Wednesday, and by the time he came on Sunday night, I had thought a little better of this. Maybe that's not the best way to introduce yourself to a new guy. In my day, we girls didn't ask boys out. And so I had a pink suit that my mother had bought me because it was "so sweet;" and it really...I didn't like it. I thought of it as old lady fabric. And, pink has never been one of my good colors, and so I wore this pink suit, and I wore my hair, which was down to my waist at the time in a bun on top of my head, which I knew made me look older and, I thought, not as good. And so, when I met him I was not looking my best on purpose, but he liked me anyway, which is kind of scary. And it was Kent and Craig and I sitting and talking to each other, and suddenly at five minutes after midnight the**



**electricity went off. And suddenly Craig and I remembered, uh-oh. We had been warned on Friday that on Sunday at midnight and through about 6:00 or 7:00 in the morning on Monday, the elevators would not work and the electricity would be completely off. It was some kind of repair that needed to be done. And so the first night I met Kent we walked up all the flights from first floor to fifth floor, and on to sixth floor for him in the dark. So, he got his own little blindness experience. And we liked each other, but I didn't think we liked each other that well. But, when he left, he suggested that he might come back and see me in a couple of weeks. And I thought more of him by that time, and so I decided that would be fine. And, I've now been married to him for--it will be 42 years in August. So, he's stuck.**

**Clarke: You realize you were before your time, actually. I mean, girls now, you know, ask guys out on a regular basis. You were way.**

**Ryan: And, I had never done anything like that before. And, I certainly have not done anything like it since, but it just seemed right. And of course, when you're 17, you know, you can't count on what seems right being right. But, you know, everyone kind of discouraged us. I was so young. And, my mother would say, well, if you love him now, you'll love him in a year. And I'd say, well yeah, but I could be with him this year. And, for the wedding I did finally say to my mother in about April I think, "Well, Mom I'm going to go and look at wedding dresses 'cause we're getting married this summer. Would you like to come along, or do you not want to be involved?" And of course, she got very involved then in planning the wedding. So while I remember that I learned a**

**lot of really great things as a student in the Orientation Center here, probably the highlight of my stay was meeting my husband. So I did go to the University of Iowa for a little while.**

**Clarke: All right. So, then after you were married, then what did you do?**

**Ryan: Well, I decided that I really wasn't ready to finish school. I just didn't know what it was I wanted to do. Now, I believed that I could do things, but I wasn't sure what I wanted to do. And so, I did several sales jobs. I sold Watkins products door-to-door; and the way I did that was that Kent worked very early in the morning, and so he was home by noon. And in the afternoon, he would drive me to my customers' houses, and he would say to me, now, you need to get out of the car and turn right and go up some porch steps and then on your right will be the door, and the doorbell is to the right of the door. So, I knew right what I was doing. And I'd get out with my big case and carry it up to these doors, and I got various reactions. Actually, I was fairly successful, but there were people like the one lady, who opened her door and said, "Oh, well, I don't want any of the things you have, but here I want to give you some money." She gave me a dollar. So I wasn't always successful. I sold BeeLine clothing. It was a party business, and I didn't have too many parties, but the ones I had were fun. Like I said, my mother wished I didn't like clothes, but I did, and so this was great for me 'cause I got some clothes. I paid for some that actually fit me that were my demonstration clothing, and then if people bought, I actually got to get more. So, that worked out okay, but not**

**for very long. I did telemarketing for AMVETS for about six months I think, and that involved cold calling people. I was given a list of phone numbers, and I would take those home, and Kent would read me the numbers, and I would Braille them. And then, the next day, I would use those to make my calls.**

**45:00**

**Ryan: And then I had to take notes in Braille of what people ordered--there was kind of a little catalog of items they could order. And I didn't like telemarketing, but I liked the people I worked with, and so that was kind of fun.**

**My first what I would call real job was with American Republic in the Assurance Division, which did annuities and that kind of thing, more security type things. I didn't understand at the time I got that job, that it was a job that was created for me, and the reason it was created was that the law had just been passed that said if a blind person comes to you seeking employment, and they're qualified to do a job, then you have to give them one. And so, they didn't have a whole job for me, but they put me to work typing letters, doing a little bit of filing, making copies. I was not allowed to use the saddle stapler machine that you could put a staple in the middle of a document with it, and it would make like a booklet. I couldn't use that 'cause the woman I worked for was certain that I would stick my finger in that stapler and, you know, have my finger hurt really badly. So I didn't ever use that machine, but I pretty much got to do everything else. Except that the letters I typed very often were form letters. I remember one day there was a form letter that I had to write 49 times and then address 49**

envelopes as well. And at that point, the magnetic tape computer machines had come out so that you could on one tape put the letter once, and on the other tape, put addresses that you could then use for filling in the address information on the letter and also on the envelope. And I wanted to learn to use that, and they did not want me to, 'cause then, obviously, I would finish these 49 letters in an hour and a half and they wouldn't have anything more for me to do. So one of the secretaries for one of the people who worked there had gone on vacation, and during her vacation, I had borrowed a light sensing device, so that when the phone rang I could tell which line was ringing, and I could take her calls, and I could get her boss what he needed, and type what he needed, and that kind of thing for him. And I had a really good week while she was gone. Well, she left then soon after that, and I applied for her job. And when I didn't get it I went to Personnel, and I said, "I just wanted to know why it is that I wasn't considered to be secretary for this man." And the woman in Personnel understanding that you could not discriminate against blind people anymore said, "You're just too fat to have that job, you're too heavy." So, I told her I would be resigning, and that incidentally I didn't believe that. Then, I went up to the cafeteria where there was a phone, and I called my Counselor, who was Ed Sheppard at the time. And I said, "Guess what, I just quit my job. They tell me I'm too fat to be a secretary here, and I don't think I need a job from an organization that thinks so little of me that they would tell me that." And his reaction at first was, go back down and tell them that you've thought better of it and you want to keep this job, and I said, "But I don't." So I spent about two weeks learning to use the magnetic tape composer. It was a fancier machine than the

**one that I described before, that you could change fonts in the middle of documents, and you could, you know, do all kinds of things with it.**

**After I learned how to do that, I went to work for what was then called the Iowa Employment Security Commission; it's now Work Force Development. And I mostly at that job typed unemployment hearings. When people quit a job or were fired and wanted to draw unemployment, there was always a hearing to see, should they get it, should it be delayed at all, or should they get it right away, that kind of thing. And mostly I typed those hearings, but I also did just kind of general word processing, when I wasn't doing the hearings. And probably my proudest accomplishment in that job was that, I got several forms that were dictated. And these were forms that needed to be in tables that had like eight or nine columns, and in each column then went letters and numbers and that sort of thing. So, I had to figure out how to layout these tables so that they would fit across the page properly. It was the first time I'd ever done work in landscape instead of portrait, and they were really quite complex. Well, the man who had dictated those came down after I'd finished, like I said, I did these for four or five, four days I think, and I did several. And, he came down just as I was coming in to work, and he said to my boss, "I need to know who did these tables, because they just were very complex, and I wasn't sure anybody could do these." And she said to him, "Well, the young woman who did them is walking through the door just now." And in I walked with my cane. He about fell over because not only had somebody been able to do them, but a blind person, you know, he was amazed. And that was one time in my life, when I believed that what I'd accomplished was amazing, too. For the most**

part when people say they're amazed, they have no need to be, but that felt amazing. I worked there three and one half years and during that time I had our second son.

We do have two children, and I'll talk about them in a little bit. I decided that I had a little time at home with his brother when he was little, but when Marcus was out of the hospital for about a week, I got a call from my boss that said, "Come back or your job is gone." And in those days we didn't have family leave, and so I had to go back. So I didn't really feel like I'd had any time with him. I thought we bonded well, but that I wanted more time with my baby, so I decided to quit my job. And I was home with him then for about a year, and then I got a call from Kenneth Jernigan and he said that the legislature was coming back into town the second week in January, and that he had received a call from one of the representatives, who wanted him to identify a blind person who could work as his House Floor Clerk. And of course, I had not a clue what a house floor clerk did, but Mr. Jernigan had identified me as that person. And so I was suppose to go and interview with this guy the next day. And I learned his name kind of, oh by the way, the person you're going to interview with is Neal Hines. And Neal and I graduated from high school at Nevada together. He was a very popular kid, and kind of one of the, you know, pretty flamboyant kids, and I hadn't really known him well, but we'd talked to each other a little bit in home room and that kind of thing. And so, the next day I was supposed to go and interview with him, but we had a blizzard, and I got the flu, and so I wasn't going anywhere. So, I called the Chief Clerk, and I said, "I can't possibly come in for this interview." And, she said, "Oh, don't worry about it. I'll just have Representative Hines call you." So, he did, and our

interview was very short. He said will you have transportation to get here? And I said not your problem, but yes I will. Well, do you have kids? So that you might need to take days off for, you know, you might have problems being here when I need you. Well, I have children, but I can work that out, not your problem. And, you know, letting him know that he wasn't actually asking questions that were appropriate. So, finally he said, "All right, can you type?" And I said I could and he said, "You're hired." What I didn't know was that one of the things I would be required to do was cut apart amendments for the bills. Every day there was a fairly thick sheaf of paper that contained amendments on it, and some of the amendments were more than a page long. Some of them were just little things, and there'd be four or five on a page. And at first I thought, oh my gosh, how will I ever do this? And so I got in touch with the Department for the Blind, and learned that there was a device out there called the Optacon that I could use to figure out where the amendments started, and maybe I could use that. So I spent about two weeks. I would work in the morning, and then I would come to the Department for the Blind in the afternoon and learn how to use the Optacon. And, after that two weeks what I did was, put the Optacon on the page, determine where the amendment started, and fold it. Fortunately, they double spaced between the amendments, and so I could fold just above that line and use my scissors to cut it out, and then I could use the Optacon to find the appropriate place in the bills to tape that amendment to. It was fairly tedious, actually.

**Clarke:** It sounds like it.

**Ryan: I also read Mr. Hines's mail, and that was a challenge, because some of it was hand-written. He did usually have to read that, and so. I don't know why I didn't even think of a reader in those days. Occasionally, I had Kent read things, but I really had a good time doing that job, because each representative had a clerk, and there were some fun and interesting people. And of course, the representatives were fun to meet and talk with and so it was a great experience.**

**Clarke: Oh, I would say so.**

**Ryan: Definitely, not one that I would have taken on if I'd known what was going to happen, but it taught me a lot. After that we moved to Newton, and we bought a bakery there. Kent had been a baker since before we were married. He was a student when we met, as I said, but he called me one morning. He always had a job, and his jobs were usually overnight, and he called me one morning and said, "I just didn't want you to worry, so I thought I'd call you." And of course, the very first thing that happened was I panicked, what happened, what happened. Well, he had been working at one of the Holiday Station stores, you know, gas station little store, one of the first ones of that sort of station overnight. And a man had come in to rob the station, and had hit him over the head with a tire iron and dragged him into the bathroom and then gone and robbed the station. He didn't get very much money, but you know, it was a little frightening.**

**Clarke: Sure.**



**Ryan: So, my first reaction was, oh, you can't possibly work there anymore. The job that was available at the time was at the bakery downtown.**

**1:00:00**

**Ryan: And Kent went in and asked about the job there, and the man said, "Oh, you're the guy who was hit over the head. I think we can do better than that here. You'll be safer here." And so, that got him started being a baker, even though he didn't quite finish school. But, you know, he said he really liked baking better than anything that he could do with a degree. So he baked for over 40 years.**

**Clarke: So, you bought a bakery, is that right?**

**Ryan: Yes. So, in the late 70's, we did buy a bakery, and I was the cookie lady, and I made the insides of Dutch letters. We always laughed and said ours was the bakery that sold Dutch letters made by an Irish guy. And people bought them very willingly. So I had certain tasks I did. I also hired a few people. Actually, one of the people I hired was not a terribly successful hire. He was a very nice young man, and he came to work and worked out fine the first day, and the second day he came in to work, and he was frying donuts, and he went out the back door, and Kent thought he had gone to take the trash out. And he didn't come back in, so Kent went and looked down the alley, and he was headed away. He didn't even say good-bye. He just went away. So Kent has always teased me that as an HR person I don't have the knack. I don't know, we might still own the bakery, except that the economy kind of went south. And so, when**

**we were trying to think of what to do, we had not gone bankrupt, but we really, you know, weren't making much money a year. And so, I finally decided that I would like to go to college and get a degree. I had really enjoyed my time at home with the kids, and I'd had quite a bit of that, even while we had the bakery. Because, you know, I did certain things, and by the time the kids came home, I was at home, but they were growing up and they were going out and being with their friends, and they didn't really need me, except as a traffic cop. Kent would come home and say, "Where are the boys?" And they would come home and say, "Hi mommy, I'm going to go and play with so-and-so." And so I was the traffic cop, and the chief cook and bottle washer. And I decided that there was more to life than that.**

**And so I applied to Iowa State, and was accepted. And then I called my Counselor. By that time, it was Dick Davis. And I said, "Iowa State's accepted me, will you guys help me with school?" And he said, "Sure, that's great. What are you going to take?" I was going to take dietetics. He thought that was a good idea. The next day he called me and he said, "Mr. Quick, who was head of Field Op. by that time, Mr. Quick has a daughter who is a dietitian, and there's a lot of chemistry in that degree. Are you good at chemistry?" And, the only thing I could think of to say 'cause that really did kind of scare me, was I don't know, I guess we'll find out. And we did. I went through enough science classes: food science and chemistry, biology, anatomy and physiology and all different kinds; biochemistry, and all kinds of different sciences. I could have gotten a minor in science. But, I did not do that, but I did labs and everything. One of my instructors in microbiology was pretty sure that I shouldn't be in the lab. There were Bunsen burners there. Our work**

**was with bacteria, and he did admit that they were, generally, bacteria that are in all of us, but he was afraid I would, I guess, lick my fingers, I'm not sure why, and I would get an infection because I'd get too much. So that was a pretty tense semester. He tried everything from asking the person in charge of Handicapped Student Services to "Get this woman out of my lab," to insisting that, okay I could stay, but I had to have an assistant. I objected to that, because I'm kind of a hands-on person, and all an assistant would do would get in the way, and make my relationship with my fellow students less than it was. And I didn't really want that to happen.**

**And so I ended up calling the Vice President in charge of Academic Affairs, and I said to him something has got to happen. Well, he and the Dean of the College of Sciences and Humanities set up a little meeting, and they invited Creig Slayton, who was the Director of the Department at the time, and several other people to come and discuss this issue. And, basically, what this turned out to be was a meeting, at which the professor and his boss were told that like every other student on campus, I had paid to take this class, and that I had been in it nearly half a semester at the time, and that their expectation was that I would finish that class, and he would stop bothering me. And then I was called into the Dean's Office, and he apologized for my having had this problem, which was very nice, but I didn't do as well in microbiology as I would have liked to, mostly because I just was so tense that whole semester. For about half the semester I didn't know whether this man would walk in or have somebody come in and bodily carry me out of the class, or what might happen. But I actually colored all our slides, and I ran them through the Bunsen**

burner flame, and that kind of stuff. And my partner in that class, who was planning to go on to medical school, he was a junior at the time I think, and I was a sophomore, looked in the microscope to see what we'd gotten. And I pretty much had to say to him, now this is what you're supposed to see. And then he'd say either, well I don't really see that, I see this. Or he would say, oh yeah, there it is. So, and I mean, he helped. He did other things, too, but he made sure that I got a full experience and did a really good job of it. And I would dye the slides because he wanted me to have the colored fingers instead of him.

Generally though, I felt that people accepted me pretty well in college, and I never skipped a class because I was blind. I tried never to ask for special accommodations for a class. There were maybe a couple of times when something I needed to do was, really, just not available to me. At the time we needed to take temperatures in refrigerators and freezers, and that sort of thing, and there was not a thermometer that I could use. And so I had to ask for somebody to go with me to do that and read the thermometers, you know, and that kind of thing. So, that was a little bit of an accommodation, but not that much actually.

When I took the class in the Tea Room at Iowa State, you know that was kind of an interesting thing. The first day we needed to show our level of knowledge about how to use some of the equipment, and we had already been through, to be oriented to the equipment. And I said to my husband, "Oh, come look at this cute little mixer." It was a 20/30 quart mixer, so it had a 20-quart bowl and a 30-quart bowl, and the instructor said, "Little?" And, I said, "Oh yeah, well you have to understand that in our bakery that we just sold,

**we had a bowl for our mixer that was 140 quarts. And so, I think that made her a little calmer about me. But the first day one of the things I was supposed to do was cut a rib of celery with a knife. And the way I did it was I'm left-handed doing that, and so I held the knife in my left hand and I followed along, you know, I measured the size of the piece of celery I would cut with my right thumb and index finger, and then made the cut along my fingers to the left; and this woman stood over me just practically in catatonic fear. When I was done she said, "Oh, thank God. I thought for sure you were going to cut your finger off." So, the one thing that she said she would not allow me to do in this class was use the meat slicer. And I said, "Well, it turns out I know how to use a meat slicer, so I would fight you for that right, because you know, I did pay for the privilege, but I won't use the meat slicer, if you don't make me serve plates in the dining room." And so we had that agreement, and actually the last day of class, she asked me to use the meat slicer, but I never did wait tables. I did dishes instead. So I had quite an experience, and I think I opened a few eyes at Iowa State.**

**Clarke: I'm sure you did. So, while you were in college, did you have to do any internship or anything like that?**

**Ryan: I actually was accepted into the Coordinated Undergraduate Program in Dietetics. And so, what I did, instead of a nine-month internship, was instead of doing that, what the people in the Coordinated Undergraduate Program did was we did a semester at Methodist Hospital, and went through rotations there; two week rotations to learn what we needed to know. We also, during the spring**

**before that, did some work with Mary Greeley Hospital, where we, you know, we got familiar with charts, and we learned how to talk to patients, basically. So, we did see a few patients that spring, but at Methodist we did take classes three mornings a week, but the rest of the time we were on the floor seeing patients. And I did that with a group of 14 volunteers, who came about a half day a piece, and they were just hospital volunteers. I did insist that I get hospital volunteers who would understand that what we did together needed to be kept confidential. What I had them for was reading me the charts, because everything was hand-written, and there was just literally no way for me to do that myself. And the one thing that I did differently from the rest of the class, was that one of my instructors fixed me up with one of the doctors at Mary Greeley, and had him take me on rounds a couple of days and show me how I could subtly learn things about patients without vision. So, for instance, if I wanted to find out if this patient who had kidney disease had swelling, you know, I would shake their hand, and as I shook their hand, I would run my other hand up their wrist and their arm 'cause I could tell if that was swollen.**

**1:15:00**

**Ryan: Or, you know, people who are in the hospital think of whoever comes in to talk to them as a professional. I found I never had problems with patients. Occasionally, I would have problems with an instructor, who didn't think I could do a certain thing, but the patients never minded, so they would tell me anything I wanted to know. I learned how to palpate someone's stomach, if they were having an issue that I**

**needed to do that. And, basically, that really helped me, because everybody else was being taught, well, you look at this and you look at this and you look and this, and I had hands-on experience with the patients. And the patients really liked it. So, I thought that was kind of interesting. I think, actually, I got a little more out of that kind of thing. The first time I went into a patient's room to interview him, it was a man. I took my slate and stylus in with me, and I said, "Now, I'm going to write down some things that we say to each other, so that I'll have, you know, this is my memory for going back and writing a note in the chart." And his reaction was kind of okay, let's get on with it. Why are you telling me this? I don't need education. So I didn't do that anymore. And I learned that if I walked in smiling, and said good morning or good afternoon or whatever, I might be quaking inside, but it got me a good reaction from whoever I was going to speak with. So that was a really good experience.**

**Clarke: So your husband can't say that you had bad PR, right?**

**Ryan: No, no not at all. I especially thought that my training was excellent in light of the fact that, when I was looking for the first job that I got, Ed Sheppard and I had gone to one of the local hospitals, where I was applying for a job as a typist. And there would have been, I think four of us in this room. And when we were finished with the interview, what I was told wasn't no, we don't think you qualify; but well, I don't think we can hire you because to go to the bathroom from your desk, you would have to go, you'd be in the back of this room. So, you'd have to go past these three desks,**

**then you'd have to turn right and go down the hall, and it's quite a ways and you'd have to figure out, you know, and we just don't have somebody who can take you to the bathroom when you need to go. So, I thought my dietetic training was proof that I could find the bathroom and patient rooms and things.**

**Clarke: I think you worked with the WIC Program at one point, didn't you?**

**Ryan: Yes, actually that was my first job out of college. In the CUP Program, the Coordinated Undergraduate Program, besides the hospital experiences, we also did experiences in dorm food service and in community dietetics. We would go out to, let's see, we visited a soup kitchen, and the food bank. We visited just, you know, several different places, because dietetics is about nutrition, and it's also about food. Dietitians are in hospital food services, and they do clinical dietetics, where they treat patients with diseases and they also do community dietetics, where they do like weight loss programs or whatever with people who are well, but have issues they want to address. And so, we got all those experiences, and one of the experiences was that we spent, each student spent the semester with a particular place. And we were required to do something significant that would be carried on after we left. And so, what I did was developed a class for the people getting WIC. WIC is for pregnant women, and also their babies and their children up to age five. The program gives them some foods, formula for the babies, food for the mother and for older, you know, the children up to age five. So part of what we were doing was trying to help them learn how to spend their WIC checks and**



**also a lot of them were on food stamps; so how to spend those effectively, to get the foods that they needed for their children to grow properly. And at the time, low fat was a very big deal, and so I wrote a class on how to pick low fat foods or make foods that weren't normally lower in fat. And I taught the class then in, I can't remember if it was April or May.**

**Anyway, I was just about done with my experience with WIC, and I went in one day and I said, "You know, I've been looking at ads in the paper, and I see you have a job here, a part-time job." And the boss said, "Yes, I was hoping you'd apply for that." And so I did. I'm not stupid, when somebody invites me. It was really kind of fun that she did, too, because when I first called her to tell her I was going to be her student, her intern for the semester, the last thing I said to her was, "Oh, I'll be the blind person who comes in with a white cane." And she had kind of a strong reaction, and she said, "Oh, I'm glad you told me that. I'm glad you can't see my face right now." And so, I thought, oh my gosh, this isn't going to be good. It was a wonderful experience. And also, working for her was a wonderful experience.**

**This was in the very early days of computers. There were talking computers, but they were extremely expensive. What I found was a person, the husband of one of the clerks who worked with me was a computer engineering student, and he was doing some work with phonemes, which were a way of making certain aspects of computer programs talk. And so Terrell did a program for me that just had spoken cues. It didn't read my whole form, but it, for instance, when I was going to ask about how many glasses of milk does Johnny drink in a day? It said milk, and then it said broccoli, and then, you know, whatever. Before I had that program**

**though, that came in about October, and I had worked already three months by then. I took my notes. I memorized the form, took my notes in Braille, and then as we drove home from the program site, I would tell the boss, you know, she would sit in back of the van next to me, and she would write down what I told her on the actual form. And we didn't have a good way for me to know where the line was that I should sign on, so she would hold two fingers on either side of the line while I signed. It was just...it was amazing, what she was willing to do.**

**So, and actually, that woman, she was asked to apply for a job later, and we became friends. She called me and she said, "Should I actually apply for this job, 'cause its food service at one of the hospitals. That isn't exactly what I've been doing." And I said, "You were asked by the boss to apply, yes you should do this." And she said, "Okay, but I need a dress." So, I agreed to go shopping with her and help her find a dress. And we went into a nice women's store, and we were looking on the racks, and I said, "Betsy, what do you think of this dress?" And she looked at it, and she said, "You know, I really like it. I'm going to go try it on." And it fit, and she bought it. And so, at the cashregister, she and I and the checker had a really big laugh over the fact that her dress for her interview had been selected by a blind person.**

**After I worked for WIC, I got my Master's degree in Nutrition as well, with emphasis in Community Nutrition. I always have to say in community nutrition, because Iowa State also teaches animal nutrition. And then I worked about 17 years for the Iowa Department of Public Health in various jobs. My last job was running the Wise Woman Program, which screened low income middle-aged Iowa**

women for heart disease risk. So we took their blood pressure, their cholesterol and other lipids, you know, tested those and we also did the blood sugar to make sure they weren't diabetic, and that kind of thing. And then we did a nutrition intervention, where we talked with them. It varied from year to year, so. But, you know, we gave them some brief information about nutrition that could help them maybe change their diet a little bit and exercise a little more, and that kind of thing. And I was not a person who went out and actually did this with women. I was in the state office, and I was responsible for running the program, including its budget, and making sure that people in the field did know, like, if they had a woman come in who didn't quite qualify for the program, sometimes they'd call me and say, "Is there any way we can fit this woman in," that kind of thing. Or, this is a new procedure, how do I use it? I helped set up trainings for local coordinators, and we did site visits, and meetings for them and that sort of thing. So, I really enjoyed that job, but I retired from it in December 2009.

And, I enjoy retirement a lot, too. I'm one of those people who people will say to me, "Oh, how do you and Kent get along now that you're both at home, because you both worked for so long?" It's a joy, it's great. We have a good time. We do have two kids, and I didn't really talk about them much. They actually are now, Marcus just turned 37, and Matt will turn 40 in April, or May, I'm sorry, May 31<sup>st</sup>. And, they were just a joy of my life. When I got married I thought all I wanted was a little girl, because I'd been raised with brothers, and I was just sure that I needed to have a little girl. And I actually have a hand in raising little girls now, because I do have two granddaughters. But, you know, there's something special about a little boy. And I have a

**grandson now, too, so I know this isn't just one generation. It was just wonderful raising the boys. Matt was extremely outgoing, and bright, and he read by the time he was three and a half; not stories and things, although at the time I didn't get very many Print/Braille books to read with him. I just memorized print ones. And he knew if I said a word wrong. He knew it. But he would try to sound out words and that sort of thing, and he loved to go get the mail. And so I didn't ask him to do that for me because I'm blind, but every day, he wanted to go and pick up the mail. And he would spell out, if he felt like it, who that mail was from some days. So, it was all very...I tried very carefully never to make my children responsible for me, or to make them my way of doing things. Well, until they were in high school and they had their own cars, and then, I paid them to drive me some places. But, you know that was good for them, too, because they made money, right?**

**Clarke: Right, right; for the gas.**

**Ryan: They liked it. Then, I had a really good experience with raising Matt. So, when I got pregnant with Marcus, I expected to have that same good experience.**

**1:30:00**

**Ryan: But, when I was in the hospital a little after I had him, there was, well, first of all, when I had Matt, there was a nurse at the hospital who was very concerned. And they gave me gas when I was having him, because they were kind of worried about how I would react, and I guess they thought a blind mother would be different than a sighted**

**mother. At the end of the week, the nurse came to me, and she said, “You know, we thought you might be a little trouble for us, but I think you must have been down to see that Jernigan fellow in Des Moines.” And I said, “Well, I was, but he had nothing to do with this particular thing.” So, anyway, when I had Marcus, I thought, well, we’ve been through that. And so, life was good, and this is going to be easy. He was first of all born six weeks early, and so he was very tiny. So it seemed like a completely different experience, but there was a nurse at this hospital, too, who was worried that I would not know if my older child was going to harm the baby. And so she told my doctor that she was worried about that. He came strolling into my room one day, and he said, “So, how do you plan to take care of this little guy?” And I said, “Well, pretty much like I take care of his three-year-old brother at home.” And he just laughed and walked out the door. But the nurse did insist that I demonstrate to her that I knew how to give him a bath, that I knew how to feed him, all that kind of thing. And I needed to do that anyway, because he was in an isolette for two weeks, and so I would go in, usually in the evening, ‘cause that was what time, you know, it allowed me to do it. And, I would call beforehand and say, “Don’t feed Marcus, because I’m coming in to do it.” And they’d almost every night say, “Oh, just let us gavage him, he’s really tired.” And I would say, “Let me try, and if he doesn’t eat, then you can feed him.” And he ate for me every time. And so and I would change his diaper while I was there, and I would sometimes give him a bath and that kind of thing. So, by the time I went home, I think they were fairly convinced that I knew what I was doing.**

**People often assumed that I kept bells on my children's shoes or that, you know, people would say to me, well, why don't you put him on a leash? And I have known people who have done that. I never did. When I needed to know where they were, they were usually loud mouthed doing something that I could corral them, and I just never really needed to. I remember when Matt was in second grade we had just moved to Newton the spring before, this was in the fall. And he and a friend were playing out on the steps in front of our duplex, and they were getting kind of rowdy, and I had very long hair at that time, too. I was sitting on the piano bench combing my hair over my face, and I said, "Boys, settle down," and Matt's little friend said, "How does your mom know we're making noise?" And Matt's response was, "She's blind, not deaf, you dummy."**

**I used to talk to the boys classes; Marcus's probably more than Matt's. When Marcus was in seventh grade, he decided it would be cool if mom would come and talk to each of the classes during the day in social studies. And so I did that for two years, and then I said, you know, really could we do this as an assembly altogether? And I did it for another two years that way. But the first time I went and talked to one of his classes in Ames was when he was in fourth, no fifth grade, and he had a student teacher, and she said...I did my talk, and she said, "Now, Marcus before anybody asks questions I want to ask you one. When did you realize that your mom was different?" And he turned so he was looking straight at her, and he said, "My mom's different? Really? All my mom doesn't do is drive a car. And her mom can see perfectly well and she doesn't drive a car either." So, I think the teacher was rather surprised by that. I got some really good questions from some of those**

**kids. One little girl asked me, “If you could get your sight back, what other sense would you give up to have your sight back?” Deep question...none. I wouldn’t. I’m fine being blind.**

**In the seventh grade I started something new, I took in, I had a set of plastic eyes that I was no longer using. And so, I had them in a little jar and I took them in and sat them on the podium, and I didn’t pass those. I used to pass around a Braille watch, and my slate and stylus, and a couple of cards with the alphabet on them. And, you know, the more things you could pass the more attentive the kids were, and interested. And so, I said to them at the end, now, I have this set of plastic eyes up here, and nobody is required to come and look at them, but if you’re interested, you can come and screw the lid off and look at them. And I said, “They don’t look anything like your eyes. They do look like them, but they are plastic, so you can’t hurt them. And, you know, I haven’t had them in my head for a long time.” So, the first little girl came up, and oh, she was really timid about opening that jar. And I said to her, “Well, you don’t have to,” but she wanted to. So, she opened the jar and her first look she said, “Ooo!” And, then she went “Ooo, awesome,” so, then everybody crowded around and had to see the eyes. I don’t usually show those at adult groups, but kids appreciate them.**

**My sons live in Ames at this point. Marcus works for the Department of Transportation, and Matt is manager of the Game Stop Store at North Grand Mall in Ames. And so I raised a couple of computer geeks. Marcus is a computer engineer, and Matt isn’t, but you’d think he was. They were at our house for Easter yesterday and they were playing a video game together, and Matt’s younger daughter said,**

**“You two are total nerds.” And Matt said, “Well, I sell video games for a living, kid.” And his brother said, “Well, I’m a computer engineer, and geek is part of my title.” So she didn’t get the rise she wanted out of that. Matt is married and has three children: Shelby is 16; Kaylee is 14, and Dyllan is going to be four in July, so he is a little more than three and a half; and they’re just the joy of our lives. One of our favorite things to do in our retirement is to go and spend the day with Dyllan, while mom and dad both go to work. We don’t do that every day, but usually, it’s about one day every week or two. And it’s just a joy, because we get to see him grow up, too. And it’s just delightful to have the girls come to our house and spend time; they’re getting so grown up. I keep telling them slow down.**

**Clarke: They probably need all the nylons, too.**

**Ryan: Yes. Yesterday as they were leaving, what the younger one wanted was for mom to take her to the store to buy mascara. So I understood that wasn’t going to happen yesterday, but we’ll see. But it’s really fun. And I guess, you know, what I think is I’ve had a perfectly normal and wonderful life. And even though I’ve had eye doctors from time to time either say out loud or express through their actions that as a blind person, I’m one of their failures, I’m sure glad they failed in the way they did, because I’m not dead, certainly not. And, I have had such a wonderful life. I actually told one doctor, you guys need to stop thinking of me as one of your failures. I’m not. I’m a success. And I think he was a little taken aback, but it’s the truth. You know, I feel very good about the life that I have led so far, and the adventures that will come up in the future.**



**Clarke: All right.**

**Ryan: It's not over yet. Kent and I, when we talk about we've been married almost 42 years, we always say to each other, you know, that isn't long enough yet.**

**Clarke: Yes. Anything else you'd like to add, Sandi?**

**Ryan: I don't think so. I'll think of things tomorrow.**

**Clarke: Well, these have been awesome experiences. Well, thank you very much, Sandi, for your time. It has been very, very interesting.**

**Ryan: Thanks for interviewing me.**

**Clarke: You are welcome.**

**1:41:21**

**(End of Recording)**

**Jo Ann Slayton**

**6/14/2011**